DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 316 885 CS 212 269

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TITLE Spelling Rules.
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 4p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Materials (For Learner) (051)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Invented Spelling; Phonics; *Spelling; *Spelling Instruction
IDENTIFIERS Spelling Patterns

ABSTRACT

This succinct guide notes that spelling rules are sometimes strange and wondrous and often more than a little complex. The guide presents rules for: (1) forming plurals and "s" forms of verbs; (2) forming possessives; (3) adding suffixes; (4) forming prefixes; and (5) the "ei" or "ie" rule. The guide notes the existence of rules based on phonics. The guide states that the "invented spelling" of beginning writers and readers gives way to more accurate and sophisticaed rules. The guide concludes that there are still, and always will be, exceptions to the rules of spelling. (RS)

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SPELLING RULES

by Edward Fry

Spelling rules are sometimes strange and wondrous and often more than a little complex. They mainly have to do with adding suffixes. Most of them are incorporated into elementary spelling lessons but as incidental information, not necessarily to be memorized by the student, but to help the student to begin to see spelling patterns. The more important Rules have Capital Letters in front of them.

1. PLURALS AND S FORM OF VERBS

A. Add "s" to most nouns and verbs. ex. cows, runs.

B. Add "es" if the word ends in ch, sh, x, s, or z. ex. box - boxes

C. If the word ends in a Y, preceded by a consonant, change the "y" to "i" and add "es". ex. baby - babies.

d. Note: Don't change "y" if a vowel precedes it. ex. key - keys

e. Also don't change "y" if it is in a proper noun. ex. Kathy - Kathys

f. For a few words ending in "o" add "es". ex. go - goes

g. However a lot of words ending in "o" just adding and "s" is OK because either spelling is correct ex. banjos or banjoes.

h. For a few nouns ending in "f" (or "fe"), change the "f" to "v" and add "es". ex. leaf - leaves.

i. Some foreign nouns have different plurals. ex. alumnus - alumni, index - indices

j. A few English nouns have different plurals. ex. foot-feet

k. A few nouns don't change for plurals. ex. deer - deer

l. Symbols form plurals with apostrophe ('s) ex. 2's, ABC's

2. POSESSIVES

A. Add apostrophe S ("s) to form possessive. ex. cow's

b. If plural word ends in "s" put the apostrophe after the "s". ex. heros'

3. ADDING SUFFIXES

Basic Rule: Just add the suffix, except as follows:

<u>For words ending in E</u>

A. Drop the final "e" if the suffix begins with a vowel. ex. rose - rosy

b. Keep the final "e" if the suffix begins with a consonant. ex. safe - safely.

c. Keep the final "e" if a vowel precedes it. ex. see - seeing

d. Drop the final "le" if the suffix is "ly" (no double "l") ex. able - ably

<u>For words ending in Y</u>

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E. Change the "y" to "i" if "y" is preceded by a consonant ex. carry - carried. (suffix here is -ed)

f. Don't change the "y" to "i" if "y" is preceded by a vowel. ex. joy - joyful.

g. Don't change the "y" to "i" if the suffix begins with an "i". ex. carry - carrying. (suffix here is -ing)

Doubling final letter

H. Double the final consonant before adding the suffix if:

1. the word has one syllable

2. the word ends in a single consonant (not "x")

3. The word has a single vowel letter

4. the suffix begins with a vowel.

Examples" brag - bragged, (not "x") box - boxing.

j. You do not double the final consonant (Basic Rule applies) if:

1. the suffix begins with a consonant. ex. bag - bagful

2. The vowel has two letters. ex. rain - rained

3. The word has two final consonants. ex. hard - harder

k. If the word has two syllables and is accented on the last syllable, treat it as a one syllable word (See H. and j. above). ex. admit - admittance

l. If the word has two syllables and is accented on the first syllable do not double the last letter (back to the Basic Rule). ex. equal - equaled.

m. The final "l" is kept when adding "ly" (this really restates the Basic Rule and Rule j. but it looks funny when you see two "l's"). ex. cool - coolly

4. PREFIXES

Basic Rule: Prefixes never change the spelling they just add on.

a. Even if it means having double letters. ex. misspell, illegible

b. Often the prefix "ex" and "self" use a hyphen. ex. ex-president, self-help.

5. "EI" OR "IE" RULE (of dubious value)

Basic Rule: Write "i" before "e" except after "c"

Example: chief, believe Example of exception: receive

a. If the vowel sounds like Long "a" spell it "ei" ex. neighbor, weigh.

b. There are plenty of exceptions. ex. their, Neil, science,either, leisure.

Note: There is a whole other set of rules that concern spelling that are usually called Phonics which contain rules like the Final E Rule and the

Syllable Ending Rule. In addition to this there are another set of rules for Syllable Division which are related to spelling. Besides this there are a whole lot of Spelling Patterns which include affixes and other morphological units, multiple phoneme units of words (like "tion") and phonograms, and relatively rare single phoneme correspondences (phonics) like "dge" making the /j/ sound in "fudge".

It is obvious from all the wonderful studies on "invented spelling" that children and most beginning writers and readers do develop their own set of "rules". For example preschoolers often say "foots" showing that they have developed the basic plural forming rule. These other sets of "Rules" might, just might, help children and their teachers to show instances where more accurate and sophisticated rules apply. The number of "exceptions" diminishes as more sophisticated rules are developed but don't panic, there will still a large body of "exceptions" and we should keep in mind that learning to spell is a lifelong process.

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